

Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists



"Walking the Dog," by Ania Neceainicu, age 12, Chisinau, Moldova

THE SHOPPING INCIDENT

It's tough to resist peer pressure, even if you have strong values

THE BULLET

Jon's family is caught in the crossfire of a rebel uprising in West Africa

Also: Illustrations by Elizabeth Crow and William Drewes
A review of a book about the composer and pianist Clara Schumann
A story from Beijing, China

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Volume 28, Number 3
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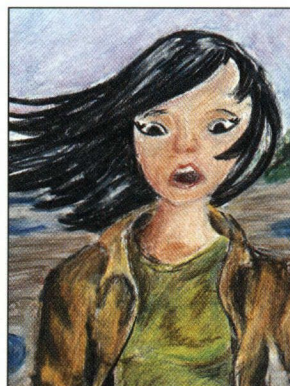
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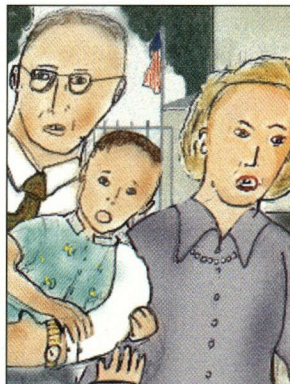
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Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists

Welcome to all our readers, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 26 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heartfelt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



Contributors' Guidelines

Stone Soup welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. If you want us to respond to your submission, you must enclose a business-size self-addressed stamped envelope. If you want your work returned, your envelope must be large enough and have sufficient postage for the return of your work. (Foreign contributors need not include return postage.) Contributors whose work is accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope will hear from us within four weeks. Mail your submission to *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, home address, and phone number. If you are interested in reviewing books for *Stone Soup*, write Gerry Mandel for more information. Tell her a little about yourself and the kinds of books you like to read. If you would like to illustrate for *Stone Soup*, send Ms. Mandel some samples of your art work, along with a letter saying what kinds of stories you would like to illustrate. Here's a tip for all our contributors: send us writing and art about the things you feel most strongly about! Whether your work is about imaginary situations or real ones, use your own experiences and observations to give your work depth and a sense of reality.



Jessie Moore, 12

Cover: Ania Neceainicu is a talented young artist who lives in Moldova in the former Soviet Union. Her art work is a regular feature on *Stone Soup*'s covers. Special thanks to Natasha Obada.

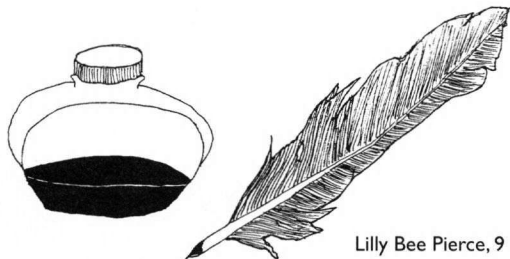
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Lilly Bee Pierce, 9

The Mailbox

I really love your magazine. I think Elizabeth Crow should definitely be an artist when she grows up. I love to draw. I do it almost every day unless I'm out of town or at a friend's house. I also love writing. I always have my nose in a book, even if I'm just reading to my brother! I hope you keep your magazine until I'm thirty because it always gives me something to look forward to. Keep up the great work!

Chelsea Bishop, 11
Weaverville, California

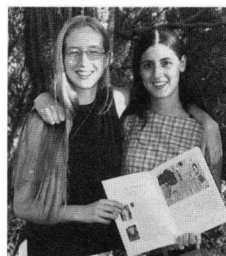
Elizabeth Crow's illustrations appear in the following issues: January/February 1999, July/August 1999, and the current issue.

I read *Stone Soup* for the first time and liked it. The issue I read was May/June 1999. A lot of talented authors write to you. I especially liked "The Price of Power" and "Henry's Fox" because they both had very good and very strong lessons. The lesson I saw in "The Price of Power" was *don't let power get to your head*. The lesson in "Henry's Fox" was *everything has a time to go*. I like to be able to read stories written by people my age because I write as well. Some day soon I will send in one of my best adventure stories.

Philip Reynolds, 11
LaSalle, Ontario, Canada

"Emily Ames: A Fictional Biography" [September/October 1999] was one of the best stories I have ever read in my life! When I was done reading I thought, a ten-year-old girl named Alison Innis wrote this wonderful story. I wish I could do that! Which is exactly what I intend to do! This heart-warming story has inspired me to write my own story one day. Great job Alison!

Krista Kucheman, 10
Sudbury, Massachusetts



Joanna and Madeline

Remember me? I illustrated seven stories for your magazine between 1994 and 1998, and I want to share with you the fantastic story of what happened after I illustrated "The Hummingbird" by Joanna Ruth Smith in the May/June 1998 issue. Shortly after that issue came out, I received a letter from the story's author, Joanna Smith. We became pen pals, and then best friends in short order. A few months later our mothers started corresponding. This past September, my family made the journey from Washington to Arizona to meet the Smith family in person. We stayed with them three days, and had a blast!!! Our younger brothers are now exchanging letters too, and our dads anticipate doing some business together. Joanna and I may even go to college together! And all this happened because of a *Stone Soup* illustration assignment! Thanks, *Stone Soup*, not only for the opportunity to be a part of your magazine, but also for the friendships that have resulted!

Madeline Clark, 15
Yacolt, Washington

Note to our readers: Send us your letters! We are especially interested in your comments about specific stories, poems, book reviews, and illustrations. We also want to know what you like and don't like about *Stone Soup*. Send letters to "The Mailbox," *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, address, and daytime phone number.

Painting the Sunrise

by Arielle Gorin

illustrated by Reve Williamson



Arielle Gorin, 12
Eagle, Idaho



Reve Williamson, 12
Palo Alto, California

THE MOIST BLADES of grass tickled Joan's bare feet and the wind ruffled her dark blond hair as she tramped across the lawn. She blissfully breathed in the fresh smell of earth while she settled herself on a tree stump to do what she had done every morning since she learned to hold a pencil: draw the sunrise.

A thin gray line on the horizon grew larger and larger, gradually—oh so gradually—taking on an orangy-pink hue. Joan's artist's eye noted that the trees, which at first had seemed mere silhouettes, could now be seen in more detail. Registering a picture of this vivid scene in her mind, Joan turned her attention to the sketchpad.

The world seemed perfectly quiet, which was just fine with Joan. She liked it that way. The only sound was the faint scratching of her pencil. Scratching and erasing minute after minute would have seemed like forever to an observer, but at last Joan put down her sketchpad and surveyed it critically. Satisfied, she gathered up her sketch pad, pencil, and binoculars and went inside for breakfast. She would put in the pastel hues of watercolors, her favorite part, later.

Bacon sizzling in a hot frying pan may have been a welcome sound to other ears, but Joan merely swallowed some cornflakes in surprisingly few mouthfuls and drank her orange juice in one long gulp. This was not because she was hungry, but because she wanted to get the dull process of



Registering a picture of this vivid scene in her mind, Joan turned her attention to the sketchpad

eating over with as soon as possible when there were more important things, like drawing, to do.

"I warn you, Joan Elise Bailey, you are going to *choke* if you keep eating like that!" admonished Mrs. Bailey. Even when scolding, Mrs. Bailey's musical voice with its slight southern accent was as beautiful as her looks.

With her short, wheat-colored hair (the same color as Joan's) curled becomingly about her face and her slim, stylishly clothed figure, it was no wonder that Mrs. Bailey had been a small-time movie actress before Joan was born.

It was hard for Joan to live up to her mother's expectations. Mr. Bailey made quite a bit of money at his work and Mrs. Bailey lavished it on acting lessons and an agent for Joan, her only child. She was determined that Joan be a famous actress. Any other girl would have been delighted with this, but Joan wasn't. She hated the dazzling lights of the big cities where she went to auditions, the strange, fluttery feeling in her stomach and the limp, silly-putty feeling in her knees when she got up on a stage. She hated pretending to be someone she wasn't in a stiff, sweaty, awkward costume. Worst of all she hated the discouraged look on her mother's face when Joan didn't get the part she auditioned for (she never did). She didn't want to complain for fear of sounding ungrateful, but Joan would have rather had mediocre art lessons than the finest acting lessons in the world.

One afternoon, Joan and her best

friend, Alice, were walking home from school together. Alice was a vivacious girl with fiery red hair who loved to write. Joan had agreed to illustrate all Alice's stories, which was a big job considering how many stories Alice wrote.

"You know, Joan," commented Alice, "you ought to try entering some kind of drawing contest. There's a big one in a magazine I get. Our teacher says you're the best artist in the entire sixth grade, and besides, maybe your winning an art contest would convince your parents to give you art lessons instead of those *horrible* acting lessons." Alice was one of only two people (the other one being Joan's grandma) who knew about Joan's dilemma.

Joan's blue eyes lit up at Alice's suggestion, for she passionately wanted art lessons. It would be a huge relief to quit acting, too. The girls chatted about unimportant things the rest of the way home, but Joan's mind wasn't on the chatter. She was too eager about the contest. The next day she sent off her most beautiful sunrise picture to the address Alice had given her, and from then on she haunted the mailbox like a ghost.

A week or two later, Joan was rifling through some letters, mostly bills, hurriedly. She was in a hurry because her grandpa and grandma were coming to dinner and she needed to help Mrs. Bailey cook. There was a phone bill, a solicitation for money, a letter from her English pen pal (Yippee! thought Joan), a Happy Easter card . . .

She was almost done when her eyes

fell on a small, yellowy-white envelope. She gasped when she saw the return address. It was a response to her contest entry! Joan's fingers trembled as she slowly tore it open, sitting on her habitual drawing stump. In breathless suspense, she drew out a single sheet of paper, evidently a letter. Alice, who had more experience with these things, would have known this was a bad sign, but Joan eagerly began to read it.

"We regret that you were not among the finalists, however . . ."

That was enough.

Joan fell off the stump sobbing. Then she crumpled up the letter and threw it as hard as she could. She didn't have any talent after all! She would never get any lessons now! That was what hurt the most. No lessons. Zero. Zilch. Nada. Nothing. Joan collapsed into a sobbing heap on the lawn.

A car pulled up on the Baileys' driveway. Grandpa got out and took the cake that he and Grandma had brought inside, but Grandma stopped, noticing Joan. She picked up the crumpled letter Joan had thrown and read it. Sitting down on the grass as carelessly as if she

were wearing jeans, even though she was wearing an old-fashioned dress with a flowered print, she explained, "You can't expect to win the first contest you enter, Joan."

Joan kept sobbing and gasped, "No art lessons."

"I see," said Grandma, her kind, wrinkled face frowning. "Lessons are important, but practice is the most important thing. Do you ever watch the sunrise, Joan?"

Joan nodded.

"Well, imagine that the thin gray line on the horizon is your talent and the orangy-pink hue it takes on is practice. The more you practice, the brighter and more colorful it gets. To reach full sunshine, or full talent, takes determination. But I know you have it." Joan's face was looking brighter now. "As to the lessons," continued Grandma, "I'm a bit of a painter myself actually. In fact, I don't think dinner will be ready for a while, so I can help you with something right now. Would you like that?"

Joan nodded, smiled, and wiped away her tears. Then she took out her sketchpad and began to draw. ❖

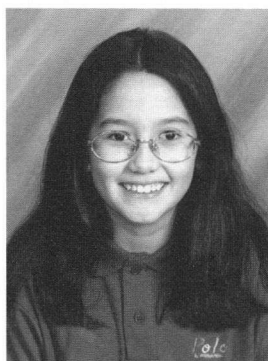
Meet Soon-Soon

by Sarah Heng Blackburn

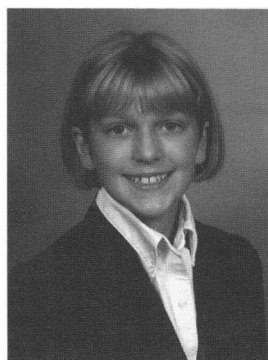
illustrated by Elizabeth Crow

CHAPTER ONE

THE WANG FAMILY



Sarah Heng Blackburn, 11
Beijing, China

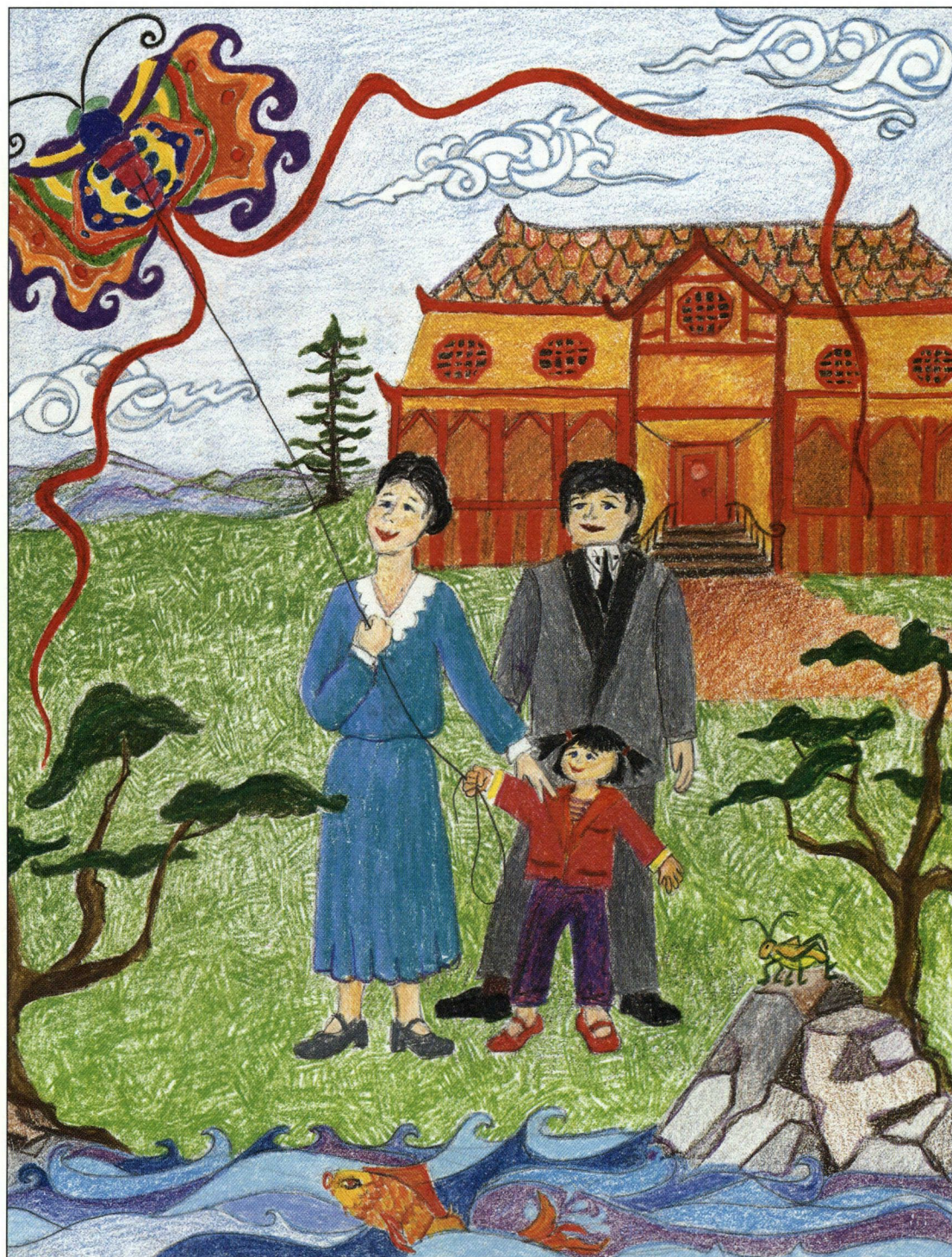


Elizabeth Crow, 13
Dallas, Texas

SOON-SOON WANG WAS an energetic eight-year-old Chinese girl from Beijing. She was full of life. Her black eyes always seemed to be dancing. Her grandfathers and great-grandfathers had been court officials during the Qing Dynasty at the Forbidden City. Her parents had been sent to study in England. Her father became a senior scientist at the National Chinese Space Program in Beijing and her mother worked at the Beijing Children's Hospital. When her paternal grandfather died, Soon-Soon's father, being the oldest son, inherited his house. It had ten bedrooms and three bathrooms. It had magnificent courtyards, stupendous gardens, and two goldfish ponds. They had many people to wait on them. Every night a tremendous meal was served. The rooms were huge and spacious. Soon-Soon had never had to do much work. She only ate, slept, played, or her parents took her on outings and shopping trips.

Soon-Soon's parents got married seven years after the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949. They greatly supported the new government. They lived a happy life until 1966 when the chaotic Cultural Revolution began. They were in great danger since they lived in such a grand house. In 1963 Mrs. Wang (Wang Chun-Mei) gave birth to a little girl whom they named Soon-Soon.

Soon-Soon was extremely lucky. All around her people



The house had magnificent courtyards, stupendous gardens, and two goldfish ponds

were thrown out of their houses and moved off to the countryside with only what they could carry by themselves. But some fortunate women managed to sew their jewelry in the hems of their clothes so they could exchange them for food in the hard times ahead. No bright colors could be seen anywhere. Soon-Soon was too young to know quite what was going on, but she knew her life would never be the same again. Her family was very lucky not to be a part of it, for the time being at least, because of her father's important job at the Chinese space research program. In the future bad things would happen, but not for a while.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LITTLE COMPANION

WHEN SOON-SOON was four, the government of Mao Zedong moved nine other families into the house. Every family got just one bedroom. Everyone had to share all the other rooms. There was always a line to use the bathroom in the morning.

Next to the Wangs' room was the Bais' room. Lao Bai, the grandfather, was an extreme grouch. He had arthritis in his hands and legs, and he never got over the loss of his house and his antique furniture. His son Wen-Wen and his daughter-in-law Yi-Hua were both always working late at the clothing factory, leaving little Xiao-Long behind. Xiao-Long was the same age as Soon-Soon. He always pulled pranks on Lao Bai. He often hid Lao Bai's arthritis pills.

That is exactly why Soon-Soon liked him. They soon became the best of friends.

The ten families lived together until the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. The Wangs were then given the house back. All the families left except the Bais, whom the Wangs allowed to stay.

During the Chinese New Year of 1971, when Soon-Soon and Xiao-Long were both eight, they went out for a day of fun. First they counted all their savings. They had enough to go to the Chinese opera but needed five mao more in order to go ice-skating as well. Soon-Soon and Xiao-Long pestered Lao Bai until he finally gave in and gave them the money. The two children raced each other to the bus stop. They each had bus passes so they didn't pay for the bus ticket.

When they arrived at the opera theater, they excitedly settled down in their seats and watched eagerly as the curtains parted, revealing a table and chairs. They watched three fascinating shows. Xiao-Long's favorite was about the monkey king playing many mischievous pranks on the Celestial Emperor. Soon-Soon's favorite was about a poor but beautiful girl who got married to a rich man.

After it was all over, they got on another bus to go to the lake near Bei Hai. They rented skates and raced each other to a hole in the ice where people were ice-swimming. They gasped because the temperature was below zero.

"How on earth can they do that?"

Soon-Soon asked, awestruck.

"How should I know?" Xiao-Long replied. "Perhaps they've been training in cold weather."

They watched for a little while longer but soon got bored. They went to one of the food sellers and bought some noodles, with Lao Bai's money. They finished eating and skated some more. Xiao-Long started doing some fancy spins and jumps, he was a show-off, but he fell down a lot and was very dirty by the time they got home.

At Lao Bai's room they wished they had earplugs. Lao Bai yelled at them for getting dirty. When they finally got away they ran to Soon-Soon's parents' room. Soon-Soon's parents were not there! There was a message for Soon-Soon on the table. It said,

Dear Soon-Soon,

We have been taken away by the government because of your grandfather's high positions with the Qing Emperors at the Forbidden City. You go live with the Bais. You are lucky you weren't home. Otherwise you would have been taken too. Try and contact your Uncle Kee-Yong. Ask him to take you to his house in America. His address is: 1588 Highland Glen, McLean, Virginia 22101, USA.

Love,
Your Parents

They grabbed the letter and ran to show it to Lao Bai. He allowed Soon-Soon to stay with his family. She was devastated and cried herself to sleep every night for two months. But the

thought of America, the land of opportunity, gave her hope.

CHAPTER THREE

UNCLE KEE-YONG TO THE RESCUE!

"**L**AO BAI, can we have some paper?" Xiao-Long asked.

It was a month after Soon-Soon's parents had been taken away. She and Xiao-Long were going to write a letter to her uncle in America. He was her mother's brother and had left China before the Cultural Revolution. He could get Soon-Soon tickets and a passport so she could go live with him. She and Xiao-Long wrote the letter and sent it off.

A month later they received a message from Uncle Kee-Yong. He said he would go to China himself to get Soon-Soon! She began to get ready to leave. All her worldly possessions could fit in one small suitcase!

A week later Uncle Kee-Yong arrived. He immediately went to get Soon-Soon a passport. It cost him US \$2000 to get approval from the authorities for her to leave the country! He stayed with the Bais while waiting for it to arrive.

One day, a special delivery came. Soon-Soon rushed to the door. It was her passport. At first she was jumping with joy. Then all of a sudden, she realized she would be leaving her best friend behind. She decided to give him something so he would never forget her. She found an old photograph of herself. On the back she wrote, "You have a hand, and I have another. Put them together and we have each other." She

also wrote her US address. She slid it under his blanket the day before her departure so that he would definitely find it the next morning. Then, now that she felt better, she lay down for her final night in China.

The next morning Soon-Soon was awake before the sun rose in the east. She put on her shoes and set off on a walk. Past the school. Past the park. Past the bird market. Past all the places she would always remember.

When she got home, a breakfast of deep-fried pastry sticks was on the table. Xiao-Long was looking at the photograph she had given him. He looked up and saw her.

"Thank you!" he said. "Thank you so much! I will always keep this!"

Soon-Soon smiled a sad smile and sat down. She ate silently, thinking about all the things she had done with the Bais. Then she thought of her parents. Where were they? Were they alive? Did they think of her? Soon-Soon started sobbing and raced to her room. No one followed her, they all knew how hard all this was for her.

Soon-Soon sat on her bed, staring at the blank wall in front of her. She stayed like that for an amazingly long time.

A timid knock came on her door. It was Xiao-Long. He pushed the door open and sat down next to Soon-Soon. They talked about old times, especially the time they went ice-skating, until Uncle Kee-Yong walked in.

"It's time to go, Soon-Soon," he said.

Soon-Soon gave Xiao-Long a big hug and tried to calmly say good-bye. She walked slowly down the stairs. Lao Bai was sitting on the sofa reading the newspaper. She kissed him on the cheek. He grunted but looked pleased. Uncle Kee-Yong led Soon-Soon slowly out the door. She took one last look at the big house in Beijing before stepping into the car. She didn't say a word all the way to the airport.

Soon-Soon stepped uncertainly onto her first plane. She followed Uncle Kee-Yong to their seats. As she bit back her tears he said, "Soon-Soon, you'll like America. I know a girl who is part Chinese. She'll be in your fourth-grade class next year. Don't worry, she'll teach you English."

Soon-Soon nodded. The seat-belt sign flashed on. The engines roared for take-off.

CHAPTER FOUR

AMERICA BRINGS HOPE

"WELL, HERE we are!" Uncle Kee-Yong said cheerfully. Soon-Soon stared at the nice red-brick house with the azalea bushes in front. She walked up the path to the front door. Uncle Kee-Yong rang the doorbell. A plump motherly-looking woman came to the door. She said something Soon-Soon could not understand.

Her uncle turned to Soon-Soon and said, "Soon-Soon, this is Mrs. Taube, the housekeeper," then, speaking in English to Mrs. Taube, "Mrs. Taube, this is Soon-Soon."



A plump motherly-looking woman came to the door

They stepped inside. Soon-Soon was shown to her new room. She looked around slowly, amazed that she had a room all to herself. The curtains had cheerful blue jays and yellow flowers. On one side was a desk. On the other side was a cabinet full of new clothes and shoes. But best of all was the grinning Raggedy Ann doll lying in the middle of her bed. She let out a cry of joy. She ran and picked her very first doll up. Soon-Soon named it Mei-Hua, which is the Chinese name for beautiful flower.

Uncle Kee-Yong smiled fondly at her and ruffled her hair. He said, "Mei-Hua will be your companion, but you will also have another. Elise is the girl I was talking about. She is coming for lunch. She'll play with you and give you English lessons. She'll also help you at school."

Elise arrived as Mrs. Taube was serv-

ing lunch. She was a skinny fair-haired girl with a shy but affectionate manner. She looked at what Soon-Soon had on her plate.

"This is called a hamburger," Elise said, sounding out the word carefully so that Soon-Soon would always remember it. Slowly Elise taught Soon-Soon English. It was hard, but Soon-Soon was an eager student. Several days later, Soon-Soon was able to count to one hundred and say simple words.

At the end of her first month in America, Soon-Soon went down for breakfast.

"What do you want to eat?" Mrs. Taube asked slowly so Soon-Soon would understand.

"I'd like pancakes please," Soon-Soon replied in halting but clear English. She could do it! She would start a new life, with the help of her new friends, in the land of the free!



Just Another Cat

by Jane Westrick

illustrated by the author

MY KNUCKLES WERE white from grasping the rock face of the cliff and my knees and feet hurt from scraping and pulling at the rock. I swear I had a dozen blisters inside my hard brown boots, but I didn't care. Climbing was my life. I'd always loved to reach peaks and stare down at the world from great heights, being able to say that I made it there all by myself.

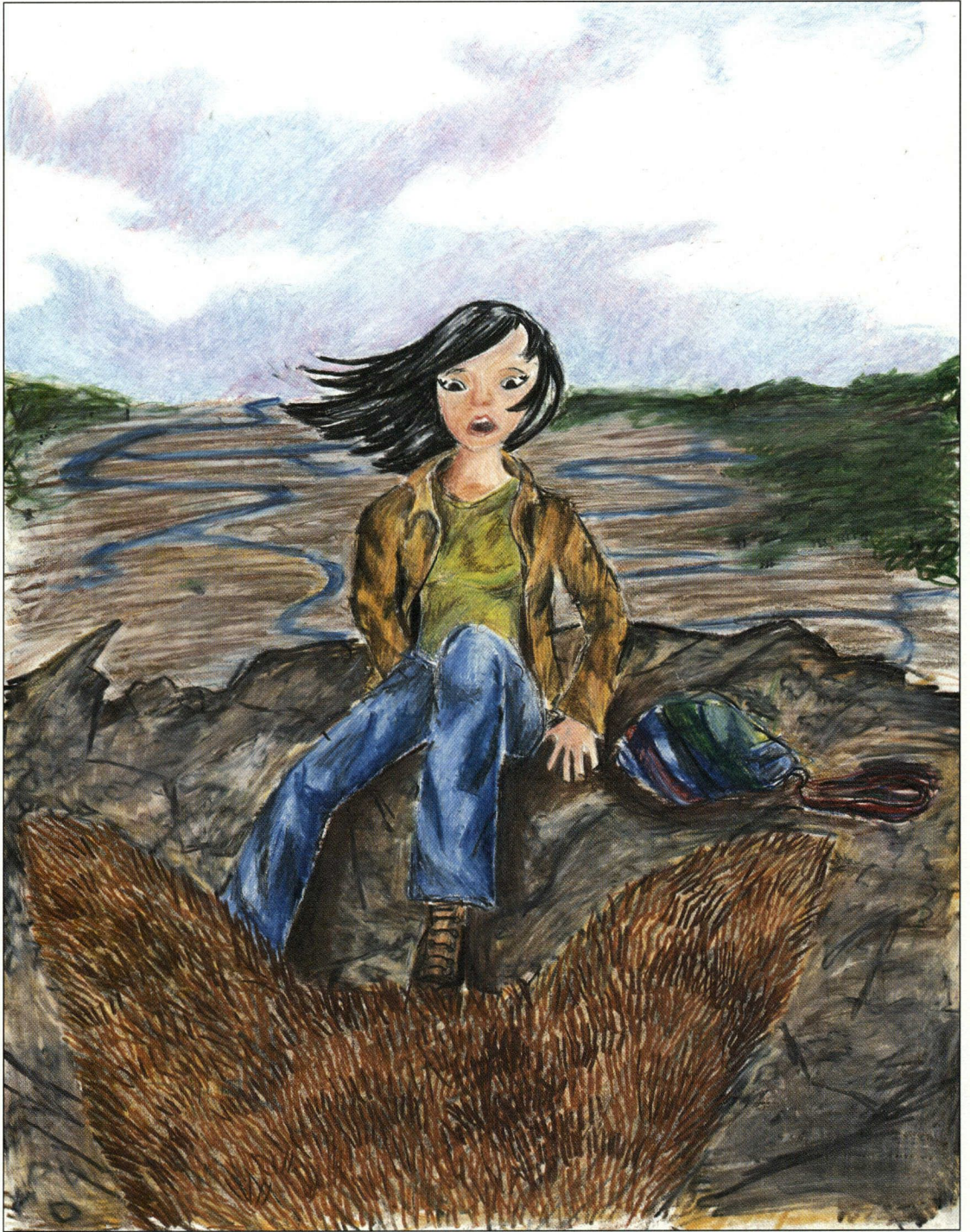
I had come with a group of friends, but I had strayed away from them, wanting to experience the elements on my own. I had told them I'd be back before sundown. I felt like I could do anything I wanted in my life. I was full of independence and freedom. I closed my eyes and let the wind blow back my long shiny black hair.

I remembered the times when I was younger, before I had mountains, I had trees. In the summer I loved to feel the cool bark of the tree against my cheek as I lazily daydreamed about my future. My cat, Princess, would often follow me, and we would enjoy our paradise together. I always ended up playing fireman, as my cute little Princess always found it easier to climb up than down. I had owned Princess for a long time, but I couldn't remember exactly how she came into my life. Was she a present? Or did she just show up on my doorstep one morning? I shook my head; I couldn't remember.

My mother would always yell at me to get down off those branches before I killed myself. I thought she was going to



Jane Westrick, 12
Mechanicsville, Virginia



My terrified face reflected in the glaring yellow eyes of a full-grown cougar

blow up and take the whole earth with her when I fell off a dead branch and broke my arm. The memory made me laugh. I love to climb.

With my mind back on the mountain, I opened my eyes again and took in the beautiful sight before me. The sun was at its zenith. The land stretched out as far as I could see. Mountains rose up on either side of me. A forest of pines crept along the horizon; the sight was breathtaking.

My climbing gear clinked and clanked as I continued to pull myself up onto the ledge above me. Finally I was able to sit down on the hard overhang of rock and rest my aching limbs. My chest heaved in and out from the exertion. I set down my pack and let myself rest. I intended to close my eyes for only a second. I did not follow my intentions.

I WAS awakened by a low snarling growl. Sitting straight up, I reprimanded myself; I had not meant to fall asleep. The last rays of the sun were just slipping over the horizon as I saw my predator. My terrified face reflected in the glaring yellow eyes of a full-grown cougar.

Three words. "Oh . . . my . . . God . . ."

I saw the brown-and-yellow blur and lightning silver claws of the killer flash through the air as he charged.

MY WORLD was thrown back into my childhood as I watched my life flash before me. Am I about to die? I

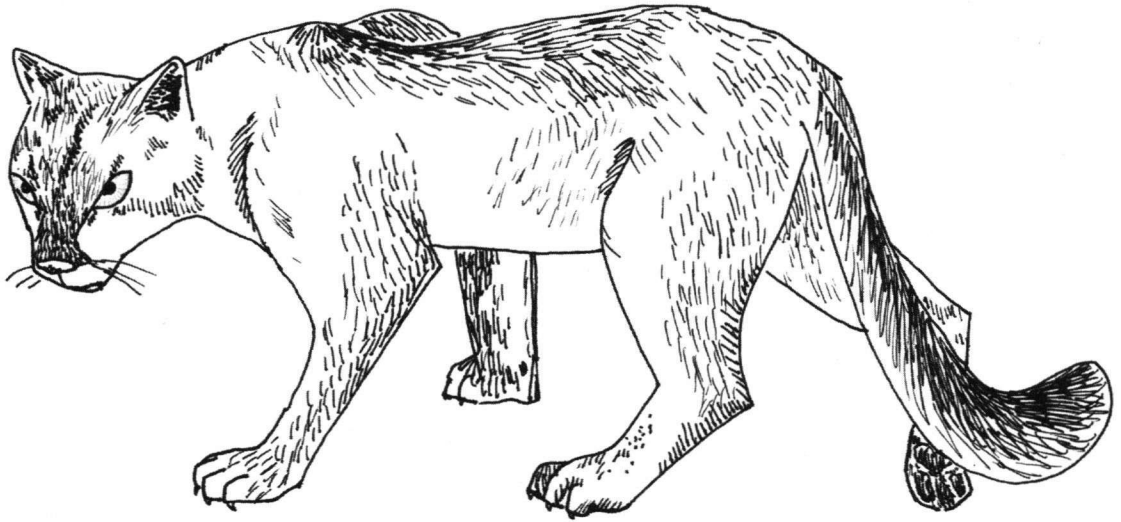
tried to scream but no sound came out. All I could do was watch this strange vision of my younger life, as I was not really there.

"Come here, little kitty," my younger self coaxed to a kitten cowering in a dark alley. I remember now; this was how I had found Princess. I watched the kitten who was to become Princess snarl and hiss at the child who was me. I looked so confident back then. I wished I was back home with Princess. The kitten continued to snarl and bite at my younger self. It didn't faze her. I listened as my younger childish voice filled the air with song.

*"What are you hiss-is-ing for?
I'll someday understand
What makes a tiny kitten roar,
There is something you don't see,
Trust in me, trust in me,
Trust in me, trust in me."*

I watched in amazement as Princess's yellow eyes eased into a greenish blue, and her bared teeth were brought back into her mouth. I had always had a way with cats, but I had not remembered it like this. The child who was me continued to sing as she stroked the charmed cat. Princess lay down her head and closed her eyes under my touch. I was lost for words.

The image disappeared and was replaced with the glaring eyes of the cougar. Immediately I remembered and, filled with panic, jumped to my feet. The powerful cougar pressed forward, his bared teeth hanging out of his mouth and his lethal claws scraping



A cougar was just another cat, and I love cats

against the ground. I felt myself backing up and I wondered frantically how long I would last if I ran, except there was no place to run to. Now there was nowhere left to go but down. Taking a quick glance behind me I could see it was either a fatal drop or cougar. Death or death.

The cougar prepared to attack. I closed my eyes and waited for the end. Why do I have to die? And to be killed by a cougar? Why does it have to happen like this? A cougar was just another cat, and I love cats.

Just another cat . . . At once a plan formed in my mind, although a very weak and far-fetched one, and I commenced to sing. My unsure and frightened voice wavered at first as I watched

for how the cougar would react to my strange behavior. The notes filled the air and the song became stronger as I gained confidence. The cougar became confused and backed up, unsure of what to do. I continued as the cougar sat down on his haunches, a strange look in his eyes. I cautiously crawled away from the rocky edge. The cougar scrutinized my every movement.

"Trust in me . . ."

The wild cat was entranced by the song. He let out a mighty roar and lay down at my feet. My predator closed his yellow eyes, laying his head on his deadly paws. I snatched up my pack, nervously backing away to find the rest of my group, aware of how close to death I had come. ❖

The Sounds of the Night

by Morgan Harris Green



Morgan Harris Green, 8
Madison, Wisconsin

The sound so beautiful
Yet cold inside
Cleela, Cleela,
The crickets chirp.

Ooo oooo whoo whoo
The owls' almost
Silent
Yet shuddering sound.

The cast of the
Whispering wind
Sends the dark
Blanket
The stillness
The coolness of the night.
Whisp win whisp win
The night has come
again.

Book Review

by Sindhuja Krishnamoorthi



Sindhuja Krishnamoorthi, 12
Manhattan, Kansas

Clara Schumann: Piano Virtuoso by Susanna Reich; Clarion Books: New York, 1999; \$18

AS HER TENDER, pale fingers grasped the ivory keys of the grand piano, she could feel herself shaking with nervousness. If you are a musician, or have another talent which requires you to perform in public, then you have probably experienced the anxiety that Clara Schumann goes through. The anecdote that I have written above is something that I made up. Although I had never met Clara in person or gone to a movie with her, this book gave me a pretty good idea of the person she was, and the things she did.

Almost every day, I hear my mother telling me to practice, and to get my projects done. I've heard a lot of people say that "practice makes perfect." This saying seems a little misleading. Do they mean that after a lot of practice you'll be perfect? If so, what happens after that? Do you still have to practice? Well, after I read just the first few chapters of Clara's biography, I realized that Clara was a very dedicated person to practice at least five hours every day! Although she wasn't perfect, she made fewer and fewer mistakes every day! Now I'll know to listen more carefully when my mother tells

me that it's time to practice!

There are many morals that anyone can take home from this book. One example of that is believing in yourself and other people. Would you believe in a selfish man who has lost his wife because of his terrible greed for money? Well, I don't think I would even trust him with a rusted penny! Clara, on the other hand, had such a man for a father, and trusted him to help her with her piano career. She took in compliments with a warm smile, and brushed back her tears when her father disapproved of her performance.

Another one of the morals is Clara's dedication. If I had the choice of going outside to play, or practice my piano, I would definitely go with choice number one. Which sounds more interesting: the G-major three-octave scale, or a three-on-three game of basketball? If Clara were here, she would definitely choose anything that has to do with music. Not even once did Clara complain that her brothers didn't have to play an instrument, but that she did. She loved the chance to weep with the low keys when she was sad, and to laugh with the high keys when she was happy. I could relate with Clara in this situation, also. Sometimes, when I am bored or angry, I'll sit down at the piano and just play. It helps me to forget my anger and it gives me something to do.

Clara's strength to pull herself and her family through the hard times in her life is a good lesson for anyone. Although she did not have the perfect childhood,

she was raised in a decent way. Clara married her musician friend, Robert Schumann, who was a very hardworking, dedicated man. She had eight kids of her own and made sure that they had a good childhood. Clara had to face many tragic incidents in her life, such as the death of two children, her husband being sent to a mental hospital, and eventually becoming a widow at age thirty-six. But this didn't stand in the way of her piano playing. Through all this pain and agony, I don't think anyone could ever go back to playing an instrument that once brought them joy. But Clara still continued on her tours in order to raise money for her family's needs. Although Clara's children aren't talked about much, I wonder what they were thinking at this point in their lives. Their father had died, their mother was almost always gone, and two of their siblings had passed away. I bet Clara's children were as brave and strong as she was.

I definitely enjoyed reading this book, especially because I feel that Clara and I have so much in common. For instance, we both have two younger brothers, play piano, and like to compose music. While reading this book I could almost feel Clara's stage fright as she stepped on the stage of the Gewandhaus (a historic hall in Germany) and the pleasure she got out of playing on a beautiful grand piano. After reading this book I strongly feel that Clara's great accomplishments and beliefs should make her one of the greatest role models for all young girls aspiring to be great musicians. ❖



"Can I help you girls?" she asked, sounding suspicious

The Shopping Incident

by Meg Simpson

illustrated by Emma Edelman

“**O**K, GIRLS,” MOM said. “I’ll be shopping around.”
“Good-bye, Mother,” I said impatiently, a little too eager to go browsing with Lauren.

I had just turned twelve three days ago, and Mom said I’d be allowed to shop without adult supervision with her in the mall, just at a different store—as long as I was shopping with a friend.

When Mom turned away to leave, I grinned at Lauren, who smiled back. “Where should we go first?” I asked.

Lauren shrugged. “You decide.”

“You’re the guest.”

Somehow we chose a boutique, and Lauren picked out one of those cheap fuzzy things that you wrap around your neck called boas. “What do you think my mom will say?”

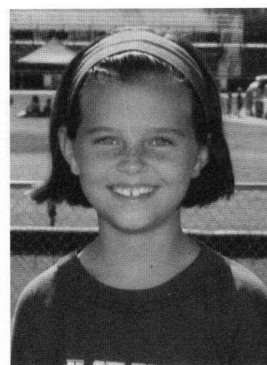
“I think she’ll say . . . ahhh!” I joked, and Lauren laughed.

We trudged into another store. I went over to look at the hairsprays while Lauren sampled everything. I noticed she was looking intently at some lipstick. Carefully she picked it up and winked at me, then dropped it into her purse. I sucked in my breath.

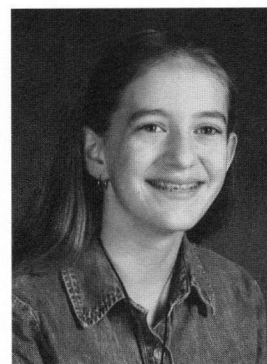
“Dare me?” Lauren asked, a mischievous look on her face.

“No,” I said firmly. “Let’s go, Lauren.”

Just then, a saleswoman came up from behind us. “Can I help you girls?” she asked, sounding suspicious as her tiny gray eyes darted from me to Lauren.



Meg Simpson, 10
Peoria, Arizona



Emma Edelman, 13
Weston, Connecticut

Lauren put on her sweetest smile that fools teachers for about three weeks. "No, thank you. Do you have any purple nail polish?"

The saleswoman blinked. "No, we just ran out. But can I recommend the mauve? It's a bit like the purple."

"I'll take it!" Lauren declared, picking up a shiny glass of the stuff. "Are you going to get anything, Amy?"

I bit my lip. "No."

The saleswoman glared at me. "Can I get you anything else?" she inquired politely, addressing Lauren, who was counting her change.

Lauren looked up. "No thanks." Then, as we walked out, I saw her drop the lipstick back into the correct place when the saleswoman's back was turned.

When we got out, I stared fiercely at Lauren. "People like that get in trouble! You shouldn't do stuff like that."

Lauren gave me a dirty look. "I didn't get caught, did I? And I didn't even steal anything. I was just joking. You're like your mother. 'No shopping by yourself at the mall unsupervised until you're *older*, honey,'" she mimicked, laughing.

I curled my hands into fists, but Lauren just grinned.

"Oh, gosh, Amy, lighten up. You're such a sissy sometimes! Come on, let's go find your mom."

I didn't mention the incident to Mom, and luckily she was busy fussing over my younger sister Rachel, who was throwing a tantrum over the dress Mom

bought her. I was afraid that if I told Mom about Lauren, she'd never let me go places with her again, and Lauren was my best friend.

When Rachel finally agreed to stop bawling over the dress *if* Mom would get her new shoes, Mom came into my room, and I buried my nose in a book so she wouldn't see my worried look.

"Is something wrong, honey?" Mom asked.

"No. How'd you know—I mean, no, nothing's wrong. I'm perfectly fine." I gazed up at my mother and smiled shakily.

"Well, for one thing, you're reading a book," Mom said, "which doesn't happen very often on a Saturday night."

I shrugged. "I decided to change my lifestyle," I said, which made Mom laugh.

"That's a good one," Mom told me, smiling. "I have such a witty family!" Then she strode off, ready to scold my sister for kicking the wall, which Rachel was doing right then.

I sighed, trying to figure out what to do about Lauren. I knew Lauren would get in trouble if I told someone, especially her mom, but if I didn't, what if she really *did* steal something, not just fake it?

AT SCHOOL that Monday, I saw Lauren but didn't go over to her like usual. I didn't want her to mention Saturday, and I was still confused.

Instead of suffering through an uncomfortable five minutes before the bell

with Lauren, I tried desperately to follow the conversation going on with the Mitchell twins. Fawn and Andrea always hang out together because they don't have any friends, but they're always nice to everyone. They're a little strange, but I like to think of them as unique, and they really listen when you talk so you don't feel like you're talking to air.

In line, though, Lauren teased me, "So you're taking the Mitchell twins over me, huh, Amy?"

With a sigh, I turned around from the sneers and Lauren, wishing I were anywhere but there.

"Sorry, Amy," Lauren said quickly when she saw my offended look. "I was just joking."

Ha, ha, I thought. Joke? I wanted to remind her that I had other friends besides her, but she'd already turned away. I didn't have to hang out with her every second.

I tried to avoid Lauren during recess by playing games she didn't like, such as kickball. But Lauren played anyway, so I quit and headed for the girls' room. Lauren followed.

"Are you mad at me?" she asked.

I didn't answer.

"Look, I didn't mean to make you mad, if you are mad at me," Lauren added.

I smiled. *This* was the Lauren I knew. *This* was the Lauren I was best friends with. "It's OK," I said. "I guess I have been kind of a baby."

Lauren nodded her agreement, and

before I could say anything, she grabbed my arm. "C'mon," she said, "let's go finish that kickball game!"

MOM TOOK Rachel and me to the mall again next Sunday to return Rachel's dress and get me some slacks and a wool sweater for winter. "Can I walk around again?" I asked.

Mom hesitated. "Without Lauren?"

"I'll go with her!" Rachel piped up.

"No, Mom!" I protested. "Not Rachel!"

Mom sighed. "OK, I guess you two can go. But stay together. I mean it, Amy. Rachel, stay close to Amy."

Rachel nodded enthusiastically. "Come on, Amy!" she said and took my hand.

I did pull free, but did walk with her to the toy store while I waited impatiently outside. "Come here, Amy!" she called occasionally. "Look at this *cute* stuffed animal!"

Finally, I told her that we were going to a different store. It was the same store Lauren and I had visited the past week, the one where the "incident" had occurred. But that was forgotten. I didn't want to think about that.

I was deciding between lip gloss and a bottle of hairspray when I heard someone whisper, "Hey, Amy, come here."

I glanced around and saw Lauren, casually leaning against a row of nail polish, a slow, easy smile on her face. She gestured for me to come. I trudged over. "Look," she said.

In her hand, there were at least six

small bottles of nail polish. "I don't have a purse," she added. "Will you hold them for me so I don't get in trouble? Just till we get out of the store."

"Amy!" Rachel yelled from outside. "You're taking too long! And I still want to look around!"

"I don't have a purse either," I told her.

"But you've got pockets," Lauren suggested.

My parents had gone over with me a million times about peer pressure, and this was one of those times when I needed that lecture again. "No," I said firmly. "I'm not going to get in trouble."

"You are such a sissy!" Lauren exclaimed. "You're always afraid of getting in trouble! What a baby! I don't even know why I hang *around* you!"

"I don't think so . . ." I started, but saw Lauren's exasperated look. "All *right*!" I said finally.

Lauren grinned. "Thanks," she said, placing the bottles carefully into my hand.

"Amy!" Rachel hollered.

A different salesgirl was at the counter this time, a young, pretty blond girl. "Can I get you anything, ladies?" she asked pleasantly.

I stuffed the nail polish into my pockets while hiding behind a display of lip gloss. "Sure," Lauren said, placing a bottle of silver nail polish on the counter. The salesgirl rang it up, Lauren paid, and she told us to have a good day. And that was it! No fussing or "Are

you stealing anything?" even though the nail polish clanked together once, and Lauren gave me a sharp look over her shoulder.

"Where am I going to give these back to you?" I hissed at Lauren, anxious to get the stolen goods out of my pockets. "Rachel's here."

Lauren stopped dead. "*Rachel!* Oh, that's just great!"

"So, any ideas?"

Lauren shrugged. "Ditch her."

I stared at Lauren. Sometimes I am pretty mean to my little sister, but never in my life would I dream of ditching her.

"But Mom said we have to stay together and . . ."

"'Mom said . . .'"

"I can't ditch my sister!" I protested. "What if somebody came along, and . . ."

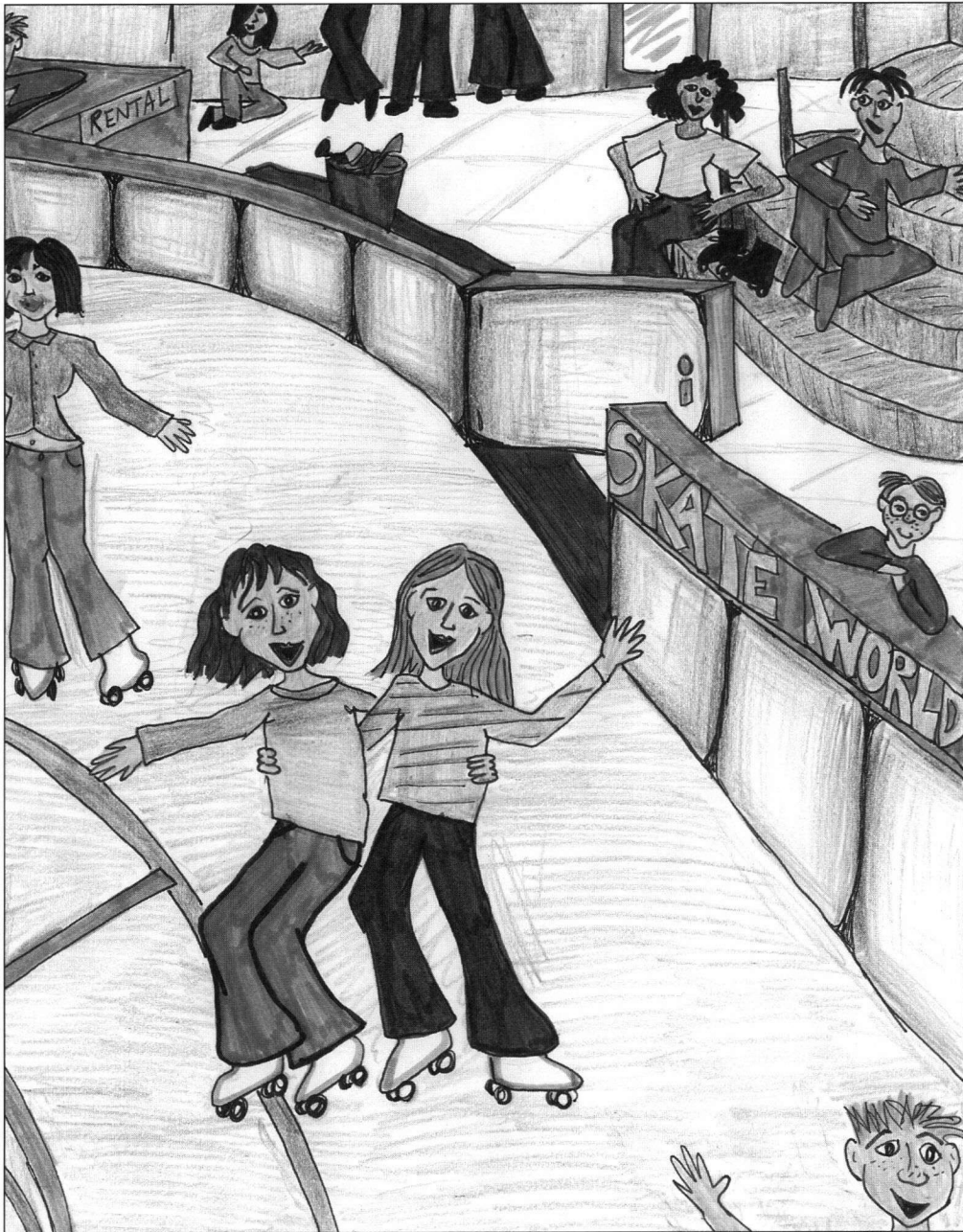
Lauren sighed impatiently. "Well, what do we do then?"

"Put the stuff back?" I suggested. "That way, we can't get in trouble."

Lauren scowled at me but walked back into the store and returned the merchandise to their proper places.

But my mind was racing. I had almost *shoplifted*. I could be one of those people they talked about on the news. Well, I wouldn't have been the actual smuggler, just the enthusiast. If it hadn't been for Rachel, I could have stolen the bottles. Why hadn't I said no?

Lauren had gotten over her sulks when we walked out of the mall, and she turned to me and asked, "Want to go to Skate World with my mom and



We pair-skated and told jokes, having a great time

me next Friday?"

I really didn't want to go anywhere with Lauren, but I just said, "I have to

ask my mom about it."

Lauren rolled her eyes. "Whatever. Tell me Monday what your mommy

said, OK?" Then she turned on her heel and walked off.

As much as I would have liked to, I couldn't end our so-called friendship right there. Lauren had done some nice things for me, she was a leader, and lots of people liked her.

Mom was irked at me for being late, and I'm sure she would've done a lot more besides reprimand me halfheartedly had Rachel not thrown a fit because she couldn't get candy. Times like that I really appreciated my sister.

I asked Mom about Skate World, and she said OK, probably because she was flustered. I called Lauren to tell her, but her mother said she was out. "Where?" I asked.

"See if you can get an answer out of her" was the curt reply, and then Lauren's mom hung up.

My heart fluttered. I had this horrible feeling that Lauren was falling, and I was about to be dragged along with her.

I WENT skating with Lauren at Skate World. She was her old self again, laughing and joking. I was glad I didn't decide to end our long friendship. She just has her days, I thought.

We were pretty wobbly at first, and fell down a lot, laughing. We pair-skated and told jokes, having a great time. I almost forgot how nasty Lauren had been.

Then Lauren invited me to go to downtown tomorrow. "I can't," I told her. "I'm visiting my grandma."

Lauren gagged.

"Grandma's not so bad," I defended. "She knows a lot about stuff, and she's given me a lot of good advice. She's really creative, too; I have a lot of fun at her house."

"Well, then I guess I'll see you on Monday," Lauren told me, chuckling. "Be careful, dearie, don't get any soup on dear old Mathilda's floor! And try not to choke on Esther's pudding. It's rude." We both laughed, but I felt uneasy, and I didn't really see the humor in her words.

Lauren's mom drove me home. That night at dinner, Mom commented that she'd never seen me in such a good mood. I didn't know how to answer.

"Did you win the lottery or something?" Dad asked me, grinning. I shook my head at his lame joke.

"Lauren and I had a lot of fun today," I answered finally.

"Oh, that's nice," Mom said, smiling until Rachel spilled her milk.

AS I WAS slumped over a bowl of cereal the next morning, Dad suddenly frowned when he noticed me. "I want to talk to you, Amy," he said sternly.

"What is it?" I asked sleepily, thinking maybe he would tell me that I hadn't done a good job cleaning his store in the mall downtown.

"Some of my clerks have reported that the merchandise is disappearing. They've listed some people they're keeping an eye on. And one of them is your friend Lauren. Do you know anything

about this?" Dad sounded so harsh it scared me.

Now was the time for a confession. "Mom, Dad," I said, then suddenly the whole story came pouring out of me—Lauren, the pressure, me almost stealing the nail polish, the pressure.

Mom's eyebrows rose sharply. "Amy!" she said.

Dad looked angrier than Mom. "Why, Amy?" he asked in such a quiet voice that it chilled me. "Why would you do that? After all your mom and I have said to you—why? I don't understand."

"Aren't you going to yell at me?" I asked lightly.

"No," Dad said. "I think having a heavy conscience is bad enough. I'm disappointed in you, very disappointed."

"And," he added, "I don't want you to get mad at me if I think twice about letting you go places by yourself."

"Same for me," Mom added. "I know how tough peer pressure can be, but now Amy, you've lost some of our trust. What are you going to do now if someone offers you drugs? And if you say no, they call you a sissy? Then what?"

Dad nodded, then said, "If you can't stand up for yourself, Amy, then you will mess up your life." He walked out on that note.

I sighed, and Mom put her arm on my shoulder. "It's not easy being your age," she said, "but believe me, you'll regret it your whole life if you follow the crowd. Do you think you'll be able to refuse peer pressure in the future?"

We had had this conversation a million times before—to where I almost fell asleep during it. It usually had to do with talking in class, etc. But this time I really listened. I would like to answer automatically "yes" to Mom's question, but I wasn't sure I could.

Not only had I lost some of Mom and Dad's trust, but some of my trust in myself had faded. I didn't think I could face Lauren at school.

And what about Rachel? What kind of example was I setting for my little sister? I was telling her to follow the crowd and not have a mind of her own and let other people make decisions for her. I felt awful.

"Even when you do the worst of things, there's always a lesson to be learned," Grandma always said. Yes, I *had* learned my lesson—to stick up for myself.

And I'd also learned to pick my friends very carefully. Sure I wouldn't go up to them and say, "Do you want to be my friend? Do you steal?" but I'd be careful.

"**D**O YOU want to go to the park or something sometime, Amy?"

I couldn't believe it. After everything that had happened, Lauren was calling up and asking if I would go do something with her again.

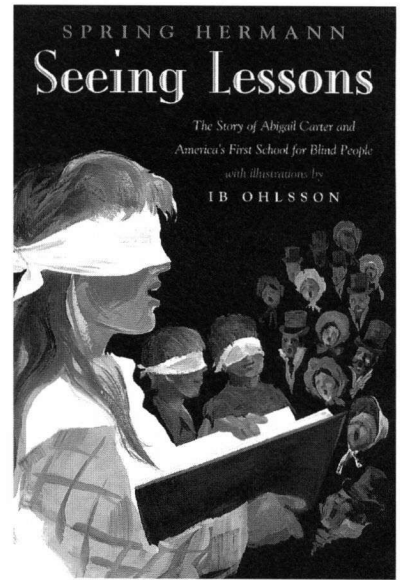
"No," I said loudly.

"Why?" Lauren teased. "Did your Mommy say so?"

"Yes," I said and hung up, feeling very confident, but still very unsure. ❖

Book Review

by Ellen Baldwin



Ellen Baldwin, 9
Floyd Knobs, Indiana

Seeing Lessons by Spring Hermann; Henry Holt and Company: New York, 1998; \$15.95

THIS BOOK TAKES place in Andover and Boston, Massachusetts during the 1830s. Blind at birth, a ten-year-old girl, Abbie, and her sister Sophia, who is six, go to the first school in America for the blind.

Dr. Howe, with a kind heart, took the challenge of turning his home into a school for the first six blind students. He did this without accepting anything in return. Most people these days wouldn't have done what Dr. Howe did, and if someone did, he would probably demand payment. Later on, Colonel Perkins donated a mansion for the blind school. It was named Perkins School for the Blind and taught students to never give up.

The book also had humorous parts. One of my favorites was when Dr. Howe blindfolded himself to see what it was like to be blind and to gain sympathy for the children. During the experience, he walked straight into a door in front of the students and the two teachers from France and Scotland! It was so funny it kept me laughing all night.

In one part of this book Abbie becomes very jealous of

Sophia. People started to say that Sophia was so "sweet to see" that she must have her picture painted to earn money for the school fair. To make matters worse, Abbie had to listen to Sophia's never-ending bragging. Abbie also felt left out because all of the other students had a job except for her. Surprisingly, even though Sophia had been so

mean, Abbie was still thoughtful toward Sophia. When Abbie was given a job at the fair, I was amazed that, after all of Sophia's boasting, she asked Dr. Howe if Sophia could do the job with her.

I recommend this book to everyone. It teaches lessons about life, like compassion, thoughtfulness, and to never give up. ❖



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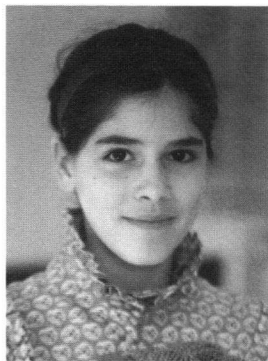
Laura

by Francie Neukom

illustrated by Alycia Kiley



Francie Neukom, 13
Sacramento, California



Alycia Kiley, 13
Newton Highlands,
Massachusetts

SLAM! THE BEIGE metal door of the locker slammed shut. The friendly round face of my best friend Annie, framed with blond curls, peeked out at me.

"OK, Francie, finished changing my books!" A large grin formed on her face. "We can go play Laura now."

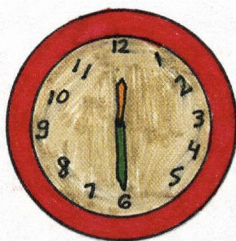
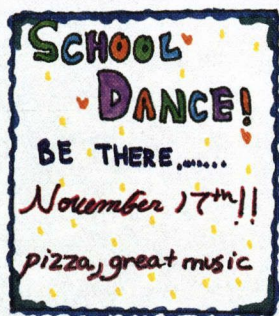
"Hurry up! Katie and Emilia are already out there!" I pranced ahead of my slim friend, my chin-length brown hair blowing in the nipping November breeze.

Katie was my twin. We were both twelve, with dirt-brown hair and hazel eyes. When people first met us, they always thought we were lying when we said we were fraternal. But most of our friends never knew how people could mistake us for identical, since they said we looked "nothing alike."

The other girl, Emilia, was a tall, also blond comrade we'd known since first grade. We hadn't become best friends until fifth grade, when Emilia's former best friend Jenny dumped her to join the "popular" group, a sad fate many of our peers had chosen to follow.

Annie and I walked across the cold blacktop, where many of the popular boys were playing basketball, a sport I'd never really liked because of the fact all the populars loved it. The popular girls stood huddled in a corner, giggling and pointing at a certain boy. I could see Jenny, wearing a revealing Bebe tank top.

I turned around and wrinkled my nose at Annie. "God,



"OK, Francie, finished changing my books! We can go play Laura now"

they are *soooo* disgusting," I remarked under my breath.

"I know," Annie whispered back. "They were making eyebrow signals to the boys all during math. Mr. Cosden had to ask them *three* times to stop talking. If I were him, I'd send all of them to the principal's office."

"Forget the principal's office! I'd send them to a different planet!" We both burst into laughter. Then we arrived at Laura's cabin.

"Laura" was a game we had played since fourth grade. It was supposed to be a depiction of the famous pioneer girl Laura Ingalls Wilder's life, although this one wasn't exactly historically accurate. I was the gruff but lovable Pa, Laura's beloved father. In this version, though, I was always trying to find a reason for Laura (a.k.a. Annie) to go to the corner.

In fourth grade, Laura's house had been nothing but a crude circle of grass clippings. In fifth grade, our house was behind a huge pine tree trunk and was a little more realistic, but we still had to use lots of imagination. But, now that we were in sixth grade and technically in middle school, we had claimed a small plot of land for ourselves behind the basketball courts. It had four cedars planted in it, with a rarely used sand pit on the right that was used for long jump in P.E., and an old, abandoned part of yellow machinery on the left that we used as a toilet (in the game, I mean.) We'd never really found out what its former purpose was.

In the back left-hand corner of the fence was a tall bush. The space behind this bush was used by us as the stables, where the many horses were kept. The rest of our rooms had dead pine branch wall outlines. The rooms consisted of a kitchen, pantry, corner (where Laura was sent for punishment), parlor, a horse exercise station (the sand pit), and many bedrooms.

Emilia played different parts. She was all of our horses, Carrie (the younger sister of Laura), and Jack (the family dog). I was just Pa and Annie was just Laura. My sister was both Ma and Bessie, the old heifer who would never let Pa milk her.

As we approached Emilia and Katie, we saw they were talking with Adam, the boy I "liked." I hated to use that word. I mean, he wasn't necessarily cute, but he was cute in my eyes because of my "admiration of his good personality," the words I preferred to replace "like" with. I gulped and gratefully grabbed one of our pine brooms when Annie offered it to me. Then I concentrated feverishly on clearing debris off the hard, dusty floor.

"Hey, Pa and Laura, aren't you even going to say hello to Uncle Adam?" Emilia's questioning voice rang in my ear.

"Uncle Adam" was the nickname that my twin and two friends called Adam whenever he visited our cabin. Annie and Emilia would ask embarrassing questions to him, such as "Uncle Adam, where do babies come from?" for no

other reason than to see him blush.

I looked up at him. His green eyes were hidden behind his solar changing glasses. Right now, the lenses had acquired a dark color because of the strong sunlight peeping through the pine boughs. His shiny black hair was slightly tousled from the wind. My palms grew sweaty and I took a deep breath. Better stay in character, I thought.

"Adam!" My voice was thick with a pioneerish accent. I swaggered over to him and slapped him hard on the back. "Fancy you comin' all the way up here from Virginie just to see yer sister 'n' nieces. Ma, bake this man some a yer corn dodgers."

Katie bustled off while she called in a singsong voice to Annie and Emilia. They busied themselves with imaginary batter and ovens while I took Adam aside.

"Best get outta here soon, Adam, or Ma'll never let you go. You know women. Always jabberin' on 'bout this, that, or the other thing." I whispered comments loudly in his ear.

"Uhh . . . yeah," he replied, somewhat bewildered and mystified about the stretches of our imaginations. I could tell his own imagination was somewhat rusty from disuse.

"Corn dodgers're on the table!" Katie called to us. We walked into the kitchen. Katie, Emilia, Annie, and I all sat down on the floor and bit into the air in our hands, pretending they were biscuits. Adam stayed standing, unfa-

miliar with our game. I took a deep breath. Reviving Adam's imagination was going to take time and patience.

"Well now, Adam, a man doesn't come up all the way from Richmond to not sit down to his own sister's meal! Come 'n' take the chair by me." I scooted over to make space for him.

"I think I better go and ummm . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Go to town?" I pointed to the willow tree across the basketball courts, our imaginary town. "Why, that'd be a great idea!" I finished off for him.

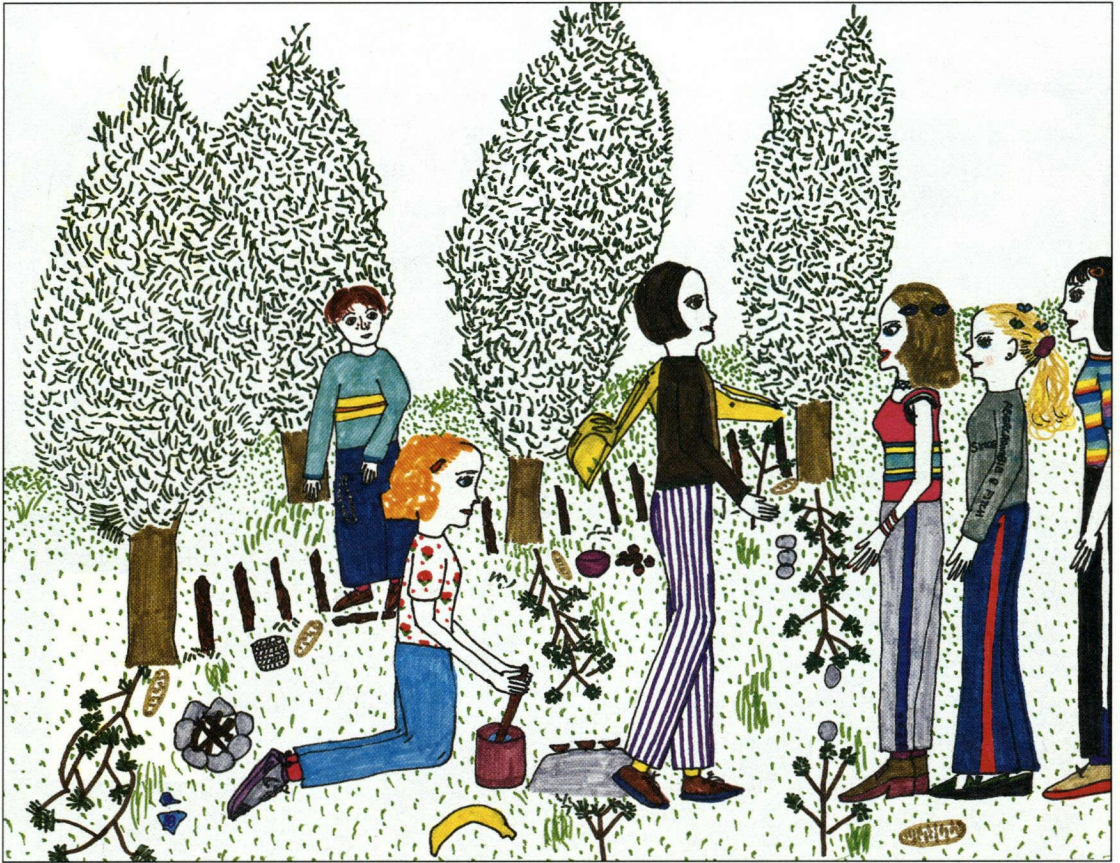
"While you're there, Adam, could ya pick up a pound of flour at the dry goods store? We're all out," my sister explained.

"Sure," he replied. Then he raced off to join his friends, the "Stardust Crew," a name our class called the kids who were into computers, after a game they all played.

THE NEXT day, something awful happened.

Katie was off exercising "Star" (Emilia, playing one of our horses) in the field next to the basketball courts. Annie and I were trying to keep the floor clean, which was pretty hard on a windy day such as this one. That's when it happened.

The populars had just grouped together and the boys were about to start the basketball game when Jenny suggested something to the girls. They giggled and nodded their heads, and called the boys over. Once the boys had heard



The whole group of popular girls, heavy makeup and all, stood there, milling around at the front entrance

what the girls had said, they erupted into loud guffaws and agreed. Then they started walking our way, evil smiles lining their faces.

Oh no, I thought. "Annie, whatever they do, don't let them see that they've irritated you."

She replied with a solemn nod.

"Is this the door?" I heard Jenny's voice behind me. It sounded like she was talking to a two-year-old.

I whipped around. The whole group of popular girls, heavy makeup and all, stood there, milling around at the front

entrance. "Yes," was my curt reply, my eyes narrowing down to slits.

"Come on, everyone, let's knock on the door. Knock, knock." Shrill school-girl giggles pierced the air.

Meanwhile, timid Annie was trying to fend off the boys, although not having much luck. They were kicking around our "walls," laughing all the while. It looked like we'd had a tornado in our cabin, what with the dirt and pine twigs strewn all around and the populars invading the rooms, knocking over many of our carefully laid-out

props. I could have screamed, but fortunately I didn't.

After a while, the populars got bored with this "game" and went off to play basketball, leaving their empty soda cans for us to pick up. Annie was on the verge of tears, and I was ready to explode. How dare they taunt our imagination! We had never done anything of the sort to them! And to think that once Jenny had taken part in our game! I vowed then and there that I would never be friends with Jenny again for as long as I lived.

THE DAY after that was cold and rainy. We were condemned to eat inside one of our classrooms. We were also not allowed to play outside, although I was determined to break this rule.

"Hey, you guys," I whispered to my table mates, "do you wanna go play Laura?"

"After the populars did what they did?" replied Annie. "Thanks, but I'll pass."

"That'd be breaking the rules, Francie," said Emilia. She was always paranoid about rules.

"It's too wet," said my sister, motioning to the rain pelting down outside of the window.

I looked at them after that, chattering gaily about our latest history project.

How could they let me down like this, when the house needed our help the most? "Well, I'm going," I told them, "and you can't stop me." I slid out of my seat, walked into the hall, pushed open the door, padded down the concrete steps, and ran. I ran across the basketball courts, rain pouring down and water spraying up at me whenever I splashed through a puddle. My hair became soggy brown strings and my clothes were drenched, but I didn't care.

I collapsed in the cabin, taking deep gulps of air after my long run. Then I righted myself and sat upright, my back pressing against the wet pine trunk. I faced the fence with my school behind me. And I just cried.

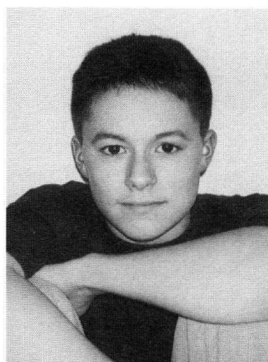
I cried because I was all alone. I cried because my friends wouldn't join me. I cried because I knew that never again would we play this game. I cried because I knew that without this game, my imagination would eventually burn out. And, most of all, I cried because we were growing up, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

I wish I could say Adam came and comforted me. I wish I could say that we all made up the next day and continued our game. I wish I could say that the popular group never bothered us again. But I can't. The cabin still lies forgotten at the edge of the basketball courts. ❖

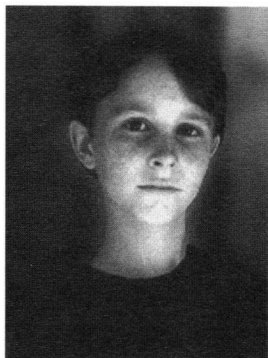
The Bullet

by Jon Breed

illustrated by William Drewes



Jon Breed, 13
Doha, Qatar



William Drewes, 13
Reno, Nevada

BOOM . . . I WOKE up and looked out the window. It seemed like a nice day but that soon melted away. There was an explosion, gunshots, more explosions, more gunshots. I knew the sound. I'd heard it before. Living in Africa you get used to these things. But never this loud, this close, and this long.

I ran out and found my mom. She was trying to keep herself busy.

"Stay away from the windows!" she said.

"Why?"

"Just do it."

I just knew from that tone I should stay away from everything.

Pacing back and forth in the long hallway in the middle of our house, I felt caged in. I was in fifth grade. I can't handle this. What was happening? More gunshots and explosions echoed off the hills. My mom hung up the phone and came into the hall.

"Where is Dad?" I asked.

"On the roof with Ann," she replied. "They are trying to find out what is going on and to see where the firing is coming from."

My dad was the Regional Security Officer for the US Embassy in Freetown, Sierra Leone in West Africa. Ann Wright was the Chargé d'Affairs.

The phone was ringing off the hook. All our friends and neighbors from all over the city were panicking. What is going on? What should we do? Mom tried to help them as best she could. I kept pacing the hall.

My brother came out from his room. My mom told him to stay calm and stay away from the windows. We sat there in a windowless hall for a couple of hours. Mom tried to entertain us with a game of "Clue." It lasted about five minutes. Who could think of Miss Scarlet or Professor Plum at a time like this?

Every now and then my dad would come in and use the phone to call Washington.

At about ten AM he said, "We are moving to the other building on the compound."

We got dressed and went downstairs. The gunshots were louder than ever.

"We are going to have to run," he commanded.

"One . . . two . . . three . . ."

Off we ran. My dad had my little brother. We ran across the parking lot, down the stairs, past the pool, took a right, and went into the new building.

Safe . . . for now.

We went into the first apartment. There were two young children that lived there. Their mom and dad were officers at the embassy. They were so young they didn't even know something was wrong. I wished I could be like them.

Lunch was spaghetti—two pieces and I was full. I sat on the couch and

watched CNN. It was about us. The update on the Sierra Leone crisis. The government was overthrown. Rebel military was in power. People were driven from their homes, looted, murdered. Fires were being set. Parts of the city were burning. What about my friends? What about my teachers?

Just then I heard a deep, low, loud BOOM. I panicked and broke out in tears. Who wouldn't? A bomb went off. The air shook. I knew it was close. My dad sprinted in and brought us all into a tiny hall. We just sat there, my mom, the other adults, the kids.

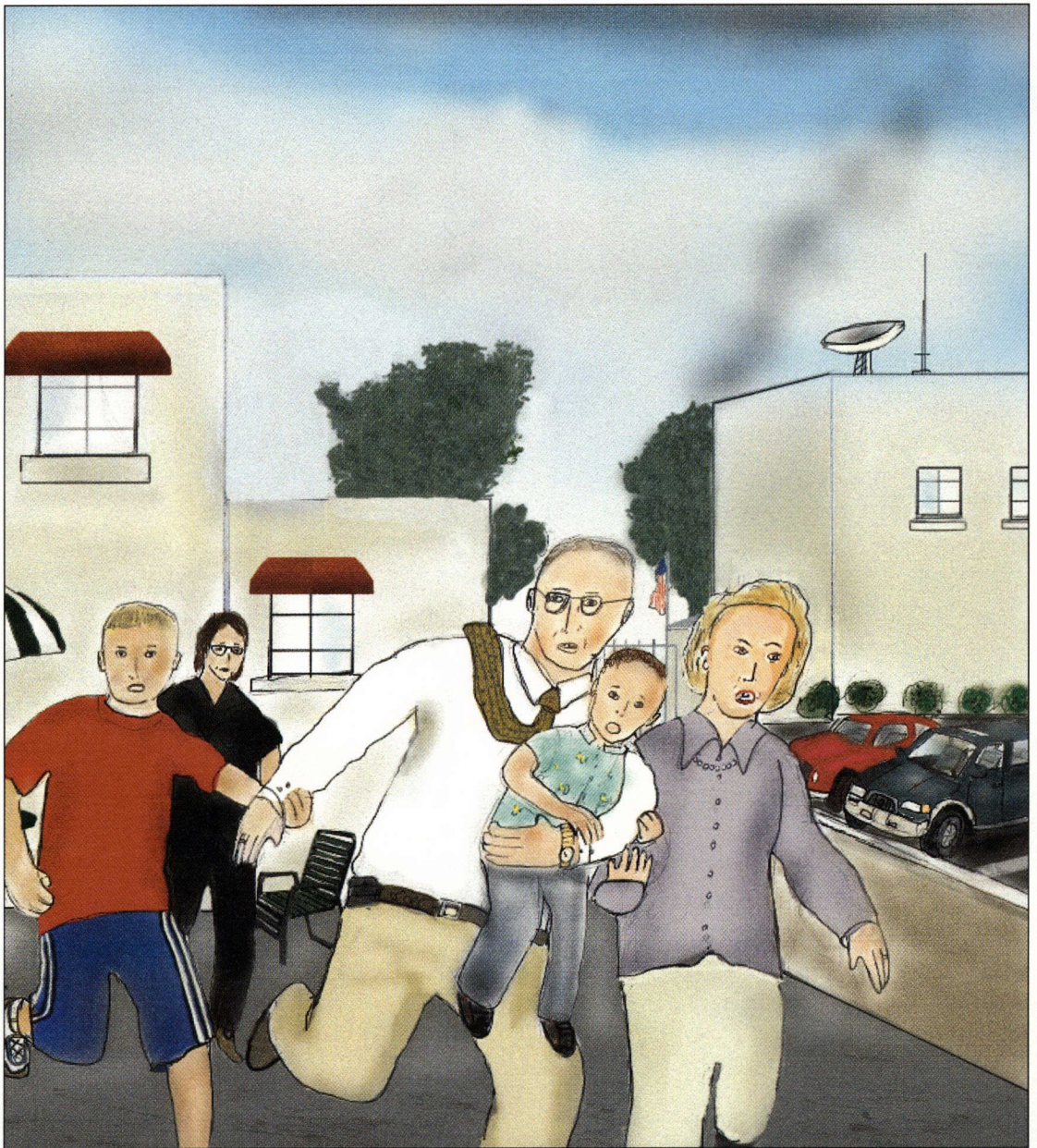
"The rebels have blown out the gate to our compound," he said.

He locked, double-locked and triple-locked us in. He went back out the door and down the stairs. I prayed I would see him again.

Twenty minutes later my dad came back and told us we were OK now. He had given them our car and money . . . I don't know any more than that. He went right to the phone to talk to the State Department people in Washington.

The memories were foggy after that. We were locked in waiting for help. There was a thunderstorm that night. I thought the thunder was more bombing. When would it end and how would we get out?

There were seven US Army Special Forces up in the jungle outside of Freetown working on an assignment. The next day they made it to our compound in their humvee and set up camp on top of my three-story building. They had



"We are going to have to run," he commanded

enough weaponry there to support a small army. They knew how scared I was and showed me all the stuff they had to keep us safe. I felt better with them

around. We were allowed to go back to our house to change our clothes.

I walked quickly toward my house to get out of any harm and noticed some-



They knew how scared I was and showed me all the stuff they had to keep us safe

thing that looked shiny not fifty feet away. I ran over to see what it was. Approaching it my mind was racing. What on earth could it be? (After a few days of intense pressure your mind starts to wander.) The moment I saw it I felt like my heart had stopped beating. I closed my eyes and pictured it lying there for a moment. The top was flattened but I still knew what it was. A bullet head. The little devil was lying there like it ruled the world. That same bullet could have been responsible for

the instant death of anyone. My dad, mom, brother, friend, or even myself. I slowly bent down, picked it up, and walked over to the compound wall. Looking at it I slowly aimed and refired it into the air. Over the wall. Out of my life forever. On the other side of the wall I heard the slight "tink" as it hit the tin roof of our next-door neighbor's house. For some reason I felt good about myself. I felt a sudden change. I fully understood the true hate in the world today. ❖

Waiting

by Annie Strother

illustrated by Camille Hebert

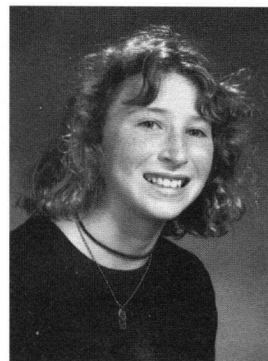
THE WIND WHISPERED through the long grass, blowing it gently into a lullaby of soft sounds. The grass rustled and the lake stirred as the setting sun dripped down the sky and below the stretch of trees that marked the horizon.

The stains it left were stunning. Pinks and oranges smeared across the sky. They dripped lazily down the great sky, leaving behind a vast carpet of deep blue, intense and enveloping. As a myriad of stars became visible and bewitching with their bright twinkles, a little girl walked down the pathway to the dock.

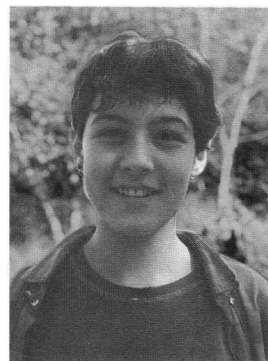
She pulled her hair back from her face and let the wind lift up the ends of it and toss it playfully. She was a very small girl, about five years old or so, with long red hair and freckles dotting her face. She had green eyes that shone like the tops of lighthouses, beckoning and beaming with a welcoming glow. Only today her eyes had lost their glow and the color in them had been washed away by tears.

She sat on the edge of the dock and dipped her toes through the clear water. She looked up at the sky and watched the last rosy finger of the sunset disappear under the tall pine trees. She sighed heavily. It figured. Things were always disappearing before she got to them.

Like the horse that she had wanted to ride at Holiday Acres, up the highway. Her mother had finally consented to



Annie Strother, 12
Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Camille Hebert, 11
Warrensburg, New York

the idea, and, grinning, the little girl had skipped up to the stables. The rustic smell of horses had filled her nose, tickling it with this new aroma of hay and wet hair. She rushed up to the large horse that stood tall above her, grinding hay between his strong jaws. He was handsome, brown dotted with white spots along his rump, as though some careless artist had waved a paintbrush over him, leaving him speckled.

Then a young woman, flushed with heat and excitement, grabbed the horse's halter and led him out of the ring. The little girl watched and saw another little girl, rosy with excitement and delight at her first horse ride, get lifted up and patted gently on the back; she was settled into the saddle. The horse tossed its head haughtily, though one could tell it was really his pleasure to be trotting off into the wooded trails with the little girl on his back, bobbing up and down and shrieking happily with each bump.

The little girl sat on the dock and dipped her toes into the water. She slowly kicked them back and forth, back and forth, gently easing them into the warm lake as she contemplated it all. The other little girl probably wanted to ride the horse as much as she did, if not more, and was probably aching to for a while, just as she had. And suddenly, it didn't matter, missing out on the horseback ride, for another little girl's terrible want and longing had been fulfilled.

The little girl sat back and thought some more. She was usually not very

thoughtful; she was often too playful to think too much. But now, as the sun's light sank out of view and the stars crept into the night sky, she thought about everything. Why was it that things disappeared before she got to them? Why did the sun set at night? Why were the stars scattered about the sky? Why did we have to wait until morning for the sun to smile again?

And suddenly, all her thoughts were about waiting. Waiting for all the stars to twinkle, waiting for the pearly disk of the moon, waiting for the sun to rise up once more. Waiting for her mother to come home from her business trip in Milwaukee. Waiting for her chance to do something that usually disappeared before she reached it.

Why did they have to wait? She thought hard about it, and unconsciously her mouth twisted into a little pout of concentration. Why did they have to wait? Waiting was not a thing, or an action, it was a state of being, she decided. A dangerous state of being. It was a time when people could become enveloped in self-pity, shrivel into a ball of nothingness. It was a time when doubt and deception could easily take control of the minds of people who were scared and alone because they were waiting, just waiting, for someone to come, or someone to go, or someone to stop and give them a hand because they needed one . . .

And suddenly it wasn't fair, all this waiting. It wasn't right, it wasn't tolerable, it wasn't fun and it wasn't safe.



She rushed up to the large horse that stood tall above her, grinding hay between his strong jaws

Maybe it would be better not to be waiting at all, so you wouldn't have to feel the pangs that were thrust into you when you wanted something badly. Maybe it would be better not to be alive at all.

This thought struck wonder and fright into her. But if she were just a canoe she could see water, fish and flowers. She could see ospreys and eagles, the three islands in Lake Katherine, the trees, the water lilies. The boathouse, the dock, the hydro-bike and the water-skiers. And she wouldn't have to wait.

But canoes had to wait too. Canoes had to wait for a chance to skim the surface of the lake. Canoes had to wait for passengers. Canoes had to wait for good weather. Did canoes feel tired and heavy when waiting so long? Did canoes feel sad about people forgetting about them? Did canoes feel as though things disappeared before they got to them?

Almost desperately, she searched her mind for things that didn't have to wait. Trees? No, a tree waited for rain so its roots could suck up water like giant straws. It waited for children to climb it and holler with delight at the view from up high, and it waited for snow to grace its green boughs. What of a boathouse? No, a boathouse waited to be opened and closed, for life jackets to be taken off its shelves, boats to be taken in and out. For skis to be taken out to smack the waves and carefully placed back again, for inner tubes to bounce and race with speed and be hoisted up and

into the corner of the boathouse once more, for the muskie to slide through the green water and hide under the fishing boat and then leave again in search of food. Everything waited. Everything.

She heard steps behind her. Turning, she saw her father who sat down beside her.

"Whatcha doing, princess?"

"Thinking," she replied, staring at the horizon. Her father looked around, at the stars and the sky and the moon rising over the lake.

"It's a gorgeous night," he murmured. The lake murmured back in reply, licking softly at the boats in the boathouse and lapping softly at the rocks near the shore. Her father cocked his head. "Hear that, princess?" he asked. "The lake's talking to us."

The little girl listened, straining to hear words, but heard none. Patiently, she tried to decode the rhythm of the waves, but she could not. She waited for the meaning to come to her, but it didn't.

The girl sighed and began to stare at the ripples on the lake. It wasn't fair. Her whole life was spent waiting. Waiting for things to come and go, waiting for a chance, waiting for this, waiting for that, hoping and praying her life won't fly by with waiting.

"Something eating you, princess?" her father asked. "Whatcha doing?"

"Waiting," the little girl answered.

Her father didn't laugh, or say she was being silly. Instead he nodded and thought himself. He didn't frown, or

smile, but remained very serious.

"When I was little," he began slowly, carefully choosing his words so his daughter would understand, "I thought that waiting wasn't fair. That it was bad and slow and made people sad. I thought it tore people apart with anxiety."

"What's ang- . . . ang- . . .?"

"Anxiety. Oh, it's kind of like longing." Her father stared at the stars as they danced and sparkled above them. "But then I realized that everything waits, and our life would be so boring without waiting." He looked at the little girl. "What would life be like if you always got your way and never had to wait for anything?"

The little girl thought. "Kinda . . . boring."

"That's right!" her father smiled. "Meaningless. You wouldn't have anything to look forward to. That's why we have waiting. Also, wouldn't things be very rushed if instead of waiting you had to do everything at once?"

The little girl thought some more. This made sense. In fact, it was probably true. So she nodded her head vigorously.

The peaceful serenity was shattered with the roar of a motorboat.

"I wonder what they're doing?" her father muttered, and leaned forward.

With a mighty burst of energy they heard the motorboat jump forward into action. As the boat sped in front of the boathouse, they saw a blond girl in a blue bikini cut outside of the wake of the boat. She was water-skiing. The little girl let out a little gasp of excitement. Her father smiled as the girl disappeared.

"I guess we should get you in bed, princess," he sighed. He stood up and waited as the little girl struggled to her feet, heavy with weariness. He took her hand and they walked up the steps to the warm house above.

Below, the water of the lake had been churned into frothy bubbles by the motorboat. Now the bubbles disappeared, and the waves from the boat crashed onto the shore. Then there was nothing left to show that the motorboat had been there. The breeze blew a kiss to the grass who shivered and wriggled with glee, then hung, tired, a neat little curl. The lake returned to a calm looking-glass reflecting the moon, a bright saucer of milk bobbing on the waves. Silently, but surely, the lake sighed into sleep. ❖

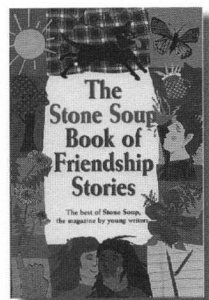
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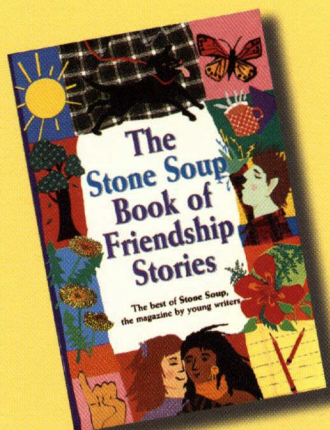
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